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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - RETURN OF ALGERIANS SPARKS BOSNIAK MEDIA
FEUD, BUT SERBS QUIET FOR NOW

Classified By: Michael J. Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: The return of the first three members of the "Algerian Six" from Guantanamo has been the top news item for much of the Bosnian media since their arrival on December 16. The detainees' return has sparked a media battle between the two Bosniak-led dailies, one portraying the detainees as victims reminiscent of the suffering wartime Bosniaks, and the other lambasting the wartime Bosnian government for allowing these "dangerous individuals" to enter Bosnia in the first place. Dnevni Avaz, typically the more conservative Bosniak news outlet and an enemy of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), slammed SDP leader Zlatko Lagumdžija -- who served as Bosnian PM when the government sent the Algerians to Guantanamo in 2002 -- for his role in "illegally" expelling the Algerians. Avaz declared that the detainees would be within their rights to demand compensation from the Bosnian government for their suffering. Oslobođenje, on the other hand, criticized Avaz for supporting Lagumdžija during the initial deportation but changing its mind when Avaz's leadership and political allegiances shifted. Predictably, Republika Srpska media are highlighting the "threat" these individuals present to Bosnian citizens and the need to expel them again from the country. While the detainees have fueled controversy more between the Bosniak news outlets than between Bosniak and Serb politicians, a battle down the line over whether to accept the two detainees awaiting release from Guantanamo could take this issue down an ugly and contentious path. END SUMMARY

Detainees Speak Out

12. (C) Following their December 16 release, the three former Guantanamo detainees gave several interviews to print and broadcast media outlets in Bosnia asserting ill treatment in Guantanamo. They claimed, inter alia, that they were interrogated in Guantanamo not about concrete terrorism allegations -- including the alleged plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo -- but rather about Arabs in Bosnia. Hadj Boudella claimed that in his first four days of custody in Guantanamo, his arms, legs, ears, eyes and mouth were tied up and he was not given any food. Musafa Ait Idir claimed that his finger was broken and that he was told he could not receive medical treatment if he did not cooperate with investigators. The underlying message of the interviews was that the detainees were subjected to these injustices simply because they are Muslim. The detainees seemed well prepared for their interview appearances, coming across as modest, ordinary people who wanted to move on and be with their families, but were ready to "forgive," a point Idir stressed

in one of his interviews. The general first impression left by this coverage is of innocent people who were abandoned by inefficient and cowardly authorities from their homeland and then became victims of a system that brutally violated their human rights. This message has had the effect of raising public sympathy for the group.

Avaz Puts Lagumdzija on the Chopping Block

13. (C) The pro-Bosniak Dnevni Avaz, Bosnia's most widely-circulated newspaper, devoted five pages of its December 16 edition to the return of the three detainees. Avaz owner Fahrudin Radoncic, who is embroiled in a long-standing feud with SDP leader Zlatko Lagumdzija, ensured that his paper's coverage of the detainees reflected this animosity. An Avaz headline the day after the detainees' release blared, "Shoes Will be Thrown at Lagumdzija." The story trumpeted Lagumdzija's culpability in the transfer of the detainees to Guantanamo in 2002 (Note: Lagumdzija was Prime Minister at the time. End Note). Avaz also provided prominent coverage to minor political figures, who echoed its editorial criticisms of Lagumdzija. For example, in an interview in Avaz, People's Bosniak Party (NBS) chairman Nedžad Latic slammed Lagumdzija, accusing him and his associates of being responsible for the transfer of the Algerian group. (Note: NBS is a small, fringe, Bosniak nationalist party with no representation in the state or Federation parliaments. Its membership does, however, include Nadia Dizdarevic, wife of one of the six Algerians, Boumediene. End Note). Similarly, Avaz prominently featured

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Bosnian Patriotic Party (BPS) leader Sefer Halilovic, who called for those responsible for the "illegal extradition" of the Algerian group -- including Lagumdzija and Beriz Belkic from Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH), who were coalition partners at the time of the transfer -- to face justice. (Note: BPS has one MP in the state parliament. End Note) By contrast, Avaz hardly noted a relatively mild statement from SDA chairman Sulejman Tihic.

Detention as a Cog in the Wheel of Bosniak Victimhood

14. (C) Although Tihic's statement did not feature prominently, Avaz did highlight SDA Vice President Bakir Izetbegovic's musings on the detainees as part of Avaz's wider portrayal of their experience as an element of extant Bosniak suffering (Note: Izetbegovic is a close friend and political ally of Radoncic. End note). Izetbegovic compared the Algerians' imprisonment at Guantanamo with the imprisonment of his father, Alija Izetbegovic, under Tito for spreading religious extremism. Separately, Avaz's coverage of the detainees compared their experience to that of Bosniaks during the 1992-1995 war. Avaz speculated that members of the Algerian group could file a lawsuit against the Bosnian state and demand compensation for their suffering during their detainment, noting that Bosniaks had similarly filed charges against Montenegro for the illegal extradition of Bosnian refugees to wartime authorities of the Republika Srpska (RS) during the war. According to the article, the Montenegrin government will award more than USD 100,000 in compensation to each refugee who survived the extradition. Coverage in Avaz left a clear impression that Lagumdzija was to blame for the "gross violation of human rights" against the Algerians and that he should be held accountable.

Oslobodjenje Takes a More Measured Approach

15. (C) In contrast to Avaz, Sarajevo-based daily Oslobodjenje raised the "Bosniak past" in a different context, raising the question of who was responsible for the Algerians' initial arrival in Bosnia. In an editorial by the paper's editor in chief, whom Dnevni Avaz has attacked as "Islamophobic,"

Oslobodjenje pointed the finger at the Izetbegovic family -- particularly Alija -- for facilitating foreign fighters' entry into Bosnia and then granting them citizenship after the end of the conflict. The editorial concluded that Izetbegovic was at fault for allowing "dangerous individuals" to enter and remain in Bosnia. It further taunted Bakir Izetbegovic, Alija's son, by reminding him (and readers) that Bakir was Alija's chief of staff at the time and was well aware of his father's role in recruiting foreign fighters. Oslobodjenje went on to point out that Avaz roundly applauded Lagumdzija's actions in 2002 and supported the deportation of the Algerians to Guantanamo at that time. The implication, not so thinly veiled, was that Avaz's partnership with Izetbegovic -- coupled with a desire to politically neuter Lagumdzija -- had led Avaz to paint the events in a different light seven years later. Avaz -- which regularly portrays Oslobodjenje, its owner, and its editor in chief as "Islamophobes" unwilling to protect Bosniak interests -- will almost certainly launch a counter-attack, perhaps alleging that those opposed to Avaz are anti-Muslims intent on undermining Bosniak interests in the country.

RS Politicians Seek Expulsion of "Terrorists"

16. (SBU) Media reactions in the Republika Srpska have been more predictable, accusing the Federation of allowing Islamic extremists to return to the country. The Banja Luka paper Glas Srpske quoted a number of RS politicians who make the case for deporting the Algerians again. Ethnic Serb parliamentarian Dusanka Majkic from RS PM Milorad Dodik's Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) argues that the Algerians should be "sent back to where they came from" and blames Lagumdzija for the crisis. Rajko Vasic, SNSD Secretary General, declared that "no free-lance fighters for religion and salvation of the Bosniaks are welcome in Bosnia." RS National Assembly member Petar Djokic opined that the return of the Algerians to Bosnia represents a confirmation that Bosnian politicians and institutions

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"enabled terrorists to move to Bosnia."

Comment

17. (S/NF) For the time being, the detainees' return has done more to fuel an ongoing feud among Bosniaks about who is, and who is not, a true Muslim -- rather than pitting Bosniaks against Serbs -- and provided yet another battlefield in the war for political and business power in the entity between the owners of Avaz and Oslobodjenje. That said, portrayals of the detainees in the Bosniak media as victims and in the RS political sphere as terrorists harbored by the Bosniak-dominated state government have sown the seeds for possible exacerbated Bosniak-Serb rifts in connection with the detainees. Thus far, rhetoric from state-level Serb officials has been restrained, perhaps because -- as we understand -- the decision to accept the Algerians was made by a unanimous secret session of the Council of Ministers, with ethnic Serb Prime Minister Nikola Spiric taking a leading role in shepherding this decision through. Looking ahead, though, this debate could become more divisive if it focuses on the two "Algerian Six" detainees awaiting release from Guantanamo who do not hold Bosnian citizenship. Security Minister Tarik Sadovic (SDA) would like Bosnia to accept these additional detainees, while law enforcement and intelligence officials insist that according to Bosnian law, those who present "threats to national security" and do not hold citizenship -- as is the case with these two detainees -- have no right to live in Bosnia and must be expelled if they arrive on Bosnian soil. If Bosniak politicians line up behind Sadovic, and Serb politicians take the side of the law enforcement officials, this controversy could take on a particularly ugly and divisive cast over the following weeks and months.

